



Prez Release

What Meaneth This?

November 2009

I find myself increasingly on a different wave-length than many friends, colleagues, and folks I don't even know as I observe the uncritical obeisance being given to what the late secular prophet, Neil Postman, once called *Technopoly*. Postman's prime example of a technopoly is the USA where he believes that technology has been allowed to intrude into culture, changing everything while destroying the very sources of our humanity. He is most concerned over the fact that in a *technopoly* there is little to invite a close examination of its own consequences and it even eliminates any alternatives to itself. This process all occurs while the *technopoly* touts such benefits as progress without limits, rights without responsibilities, and technology without cost as values to be embraced and socialized into subsequent generations.

To add to the image of the aging boomer that this essay may project, I admit to getting set off on my bully pulpit by seemingly insignificant things. A recent editorial in the *LA Times* by Meghan Daum, entitled "Suddenly America Digs Farming," caught my attention. This op-ed piece cited two current items as the genesis of her comments. The first was a reference to the *Huffington Post's* reference to "hot organic farmers" who Arianna Huffington seems to believe are the new version of rock stars and heroes who like to get dirty while supporting the great food revolution. It seems that these new icons deserve our adoration simply for their good looks and advocacy of the new foodie craze.

Daum then turns her attention to the FarmVille craze on Facebook, which launched this past June. This social game now has almost 60 million users and is the fastest-growing social game of all time. Most telling in this piece is Daum's questioning whether or not FarmVille simply represents a subculture of Internet-savvy hipsters who, like the agri-hotties on the *Huffington Post*, say less about what is actually happening than about what some people think is cool at this particular moment. With all this farming now being cool discussion, Daum wonders whether it will have any impact on eating habits or agricultural policy, since nothing goes better with Internet games than prepackaged food that doesn't require stepping away from the computer. Meanwhile, we may actually have a whole generation growing up thinking the pink cows in the FarmVille game are just like real cows who we all know give strawberry milk. ☺

Call me a descendant of Ebenezer Scrooge, but as much fun as FarmVille might be to play, when users miss work, abandon friends, and set their alarms to wake up several times during the night to make necessary moves to advance the game, there is a problem. Initial research on this

phenomenon is actually suggesting that FarmVille has the addictive power of heroin. My guess is that very few of the FarmVille enthusiasts know what it is like to get up in the middle of the night to check on new calves or lambs being born in harsh weather. It's not likely that these *Americans who dig farming* have ever woken up at 4 a.m. (every day of the year) to milk 100 cows, only to discover a snow storm has wiped out their electricity and it is so cold outside that their diesel generator won't turn over.

My concern is not some Luddite rant about the evils of technology, rather my angst is over the mindless and uncritical participation in activities that exact a huge price from people; dulling their senses to the necessary evaluation of long-term impact on themselves and those they love. I'm even more concerned about the seepage of this mindless phenomenon into the life of the Church where we increasingly champion media that our attending publics almost exclusively treat as avenues for entertainment. How is the power of the Gospel blunted by this growing part of congregational life?

After reading this essay, my guess is that some will call me an aging boomer unable to adjust to new realities. I admit to being a near Neanderthal when it comes to technology. My response to the sobering realities referred to in the *LA Times* op-ed piece is not to hide myself in some kind of a cocoon. I want to be serious about how this new reality fits or can be adapted to the new ecology. The Apostle Peter's response on the Day of Pentecost was to recognize new realities and move forward from that day with a clear focus on what this new reality meant. I increasingly believe that Peter's example is worth considering. We can't hide, but we can do a much better job of answering the ancient question . . . *What Meaneth This?*



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